



# Asthma & Air Quality

## Health Education Facts

Asthma is a serious medical issue. In the United States, it causes about 4,000 deaths each year, mostly in children. Asthma is the leading chronic illness of children in the United States and the leading cause of school absenteeism due to chronic illness. Adults have been known to miss work because of asthma.

Certain environmental “triggers” such as chemical pollution, tobacco smoke, pollen, mold, dust, and allergens from animals and insects cause people with asthma to suffer asthma episodes.

Here are some simple steps you can take to reduce the risk of asthma episodes, and make life much easier for those with asthma:

### Outdoors

- C In areas of heavy pollution, use public transportation, car pool, and encourage everyone to limit polluting activities. Those with asthma should stay indoors and avoid heavy exercise when pollutants such as ozone, sulfur dioxide, or pollen are high.

### In the Home

- C Don't smoke indoors, unless you are in a room just for smokers, with a separate ventilation system to exhaust smoke to the outside. *Never* smoke around people with asthma, especially children.
- C Call the appliance service representative or local utility company to check combustion-powered furnaces, stoves, or heaters every year to make sure they're operating properly. Change furnace filters according to manufacturer's instructions, or every month or two during periods of use. Consider installing high efficiency filters. Never use a gas stove to heat the home, and always use the exhaust fan when cooking on a gas stove.

- C Try to keep humidity levels between 30 and 50%, because high humidity can promote growth of microbes that may trigger asthma episodes. Use exhaust fans or open windows in kitchen or bathroom areas when taking showers, cooking, or using the dishwasher. Make sure clothes dryers are vented to the outdoors, and use a dehumidifier if necessary.

- C Humidifiers should **not** be used in homes of people who have asthma. The use of any humidifier, even when kept clean, encourages the growth of mold in other parts of the home. Furthermore, failing to keep a humidifier clean allows mold and bacteria to be dispersed into household air.

- C Keep the house clean to reduce allergy-causing agents like microscopic dust mites, animal dander, and pollen. Vacuum and dust frequently. If you're allergic, use allergen-proof comforter and mattress covers, wash bedding in hot (170°F) water, and avoid furnishings which can collect dust. Get rid of cockroaches, and consider keeping pets out of the bedrooms of family members with asthma, or perhaps out of the home entirely. Consider using a high efficiency vacuum filter or a vacuum system that's vented to the outside.

### In Schools

- C Some people with asthma may be sensitive to allergens from classroom pets such as birds and gerbils. Keep cages clean and don't let animals roam.
- C Strong-smelling chemicals in laboratories or art supplies can trigger asthma episodes. Make sure ventilation is adequate.
- C Gyms, locker rooms, and libraries may be sources of dust and mold; make sure they are cleaned regularly and humidity levels are kept between 30 and 50%.